

Linda Clair
Seven-day Meditation Retreat
Kallara Conference Centre – September 2019
Transcription from Audio Recordings

File 1b – Saturday afternoon discussion session

Linda: You alright?

Question: Almost. It feels better not to have to think about it and not to have to make any decisions, except get up and walk or sit. And not have to think about relating to people, or what to say, or what not to say, or what I've just said, or all of those things. Feels like the mind is collapsed a bit, or something. It's hard to put two words together and if I do – it sets me off on, "Well, why did I say that?" or, "Should I have said that or should I have said something different." Or "What's this all mean?" – all of that.

Linda: Yes. And really it doesn't mean anything. Nothing does. And you stop looking for meaning, you stop going, "What does that mean? What did he mean? What did she mean?" You just don't bother. And the freedom is you realise, "I don't have to think about anything." It's great.

Question: It feels like a bit of a worry sometimes. Well, it's a pretty strong habit, thinking about everything and trying to work out everything in advance and make sure things turn out right. Or if they don't, try to work out how to make them turn out next time. That's a strong habit and it feels a bit disorienting to have that not working very well.

Linda: That's why you have to use your body.

Question: At the end of the last retreat P. asked a question, I think it was, "Do you see from the anchor?" and you said, "Everything happens from there." Did I get that right? 😊 (laughter) Because if that's what was said, it really stuck with me. It sounds right but I don't know why. Did you say that P.? Is that what you asked?

Question: I asked, "Does your anchor become your eyes?" And you said, "It becomes everything."

Linda: And it stuck with you?

Question: It really resonated but I don't know why.

Linda: And you don't need to know why. Just let it resonate.

Question: What is basic Zen practice? If I say to someone I'm doing Zen practice, what does that mean?

Linda: What would you say it is?

Question: To keep present, keep coming back to the sensations in the body, using the breath from the belly.

Linda: Mm. So it's a bit like L. was saying – changing your point of reference from thinking, from your past, from the mind, to your body. It sounds so simple, and it is simple, but of course it's very difficult because you've been – as L. said, it's a very deep habit – thinking. You've been doing it from when you were very, very young. It's like your default position, it's what you do. And you do believe that you can't exist without thinking. So there's going to be a lot of resistance when you start to give up thinking and come more into your body. And you're going to feel disoriented, you're going to feel withdrawal symptoms because you're addicted to your mind, you're addicted to your past, you're addicted to you – who you think you are.

So when you start withdrawing from that into your body you are going to feel disoriented. Basically it's changing your point of reference from thinking, from your mind, to your body and eventually discovering where that desire to think – what that is and where it is, and it's in you, in your body. So it's *not* trying to stop thinking, going, "Okay, I'm going to sit here and try not to think" – it's not that at all. It's having the strength to be able to see that desire to think and to see the thought arise and then go, "No, I'll come back to where I am." And gradually, gradually that desire to be here becomes much more attractive and real – it's really the desire for reality – than being off in some fantasy land, which is what thinking is.

So you become less fearful but you become much more aware of the fear that's there, so it can seem like there's more fear there but it's just that you're more aware of it.

Question: That fear, I don't *feel* fear. Obviously a lot of the thinking, I can see that's fear based because I'm preparing for the future. So I can sort of understand it mentally but I don't feel frightened or fear most of the time. Do you actually feel that fear?

Linda: It'll come up sometimes when you're sitting. So if you feel pain or discomfort, really that's fear. But don't go looking for the fear, you don't need to go looking for it. And I was like that, I wasn't really all that aware of a whole lot of fear or terror. People talk about being terrified. I didn't feel that so much. I felt mild fear about certain things but I really wasn't aware of how much fear there was until it went, and then I realised how much was there. So don't look for it. If it's there feel it and don't run away from it. But keep using your body as an anchor.

So while you're carrying the wood for the fire be very much in your body. And during the sits if you're feeling a bit drowsy – and I know I tell you this every time – do the walking because you do get a bit drowsy, especially in the afternoon. So just be in your body.

Question: I want to be in my body, I'd be happy to be in my body, but a lot of the time it hurts. Then as soon as it starts to really hurt I feel that if I go into my mind then I won't notice it so much. (laughing)

Linda: Is that when you're sitting you mean or all the time?

Question: Mostly sitting. So do I just have to go through it all? (Yes.) I just have to put up with this. It will go eventually.

Linda: Well, try not to even think that. Use it to stay in your body, and when you feel uncomfortable – and probably most people will at some time during this seven-days – or you feel pain try and just

be with it. Don't wait for it to go, rather, get as close to it as you can. Use your breath to soften it to a degree. But there are times when it can be so intense that all you can do is sit there and you do wait for the bell. So there's no easy way, there're no short cuts. Most people feel this, not everyone but most, but the pain does become your teacher and you start to see how much it's doing. It's forcing you to be here in your body. And you do need to be forced in some way to be in your body.

The pain is also a sort of a resistance. It's regulating the amount of energy that is coming in to your body so that you don't take in too much at once. So it's also doing that.

Question: What would happen if you took in too much energy? I might pass out or something?

Linda: I feel maybe that does happen sometimes to people and they have a bit of a mental breakdown, physical breakdown, because it's just too much. It's like it's burning the circuits – too much has come in at once before your body is prepared. So this is preparing your body for realisation, for that huge influx of energy, and while that's happening it's clearing your body out of the past. The pain that you feel is that energy meeting that past in your body and purifying it. And the way to purify it is to just sit with it – not run away from it, not get away from it in any way – just sit with it.

Question: So I have to be patient.

Linda: Be patient. If it gets a bit too much make sure you get up and do the walking, because the longer you sit, usually, the more intense it becomes. And it doesn't matter how young you are, how old you are, you're going to feel it. It's amazing you're sitting here at, how old? Eighty-eight, it's incredible. It's great that you're here, B. And you don't have to come to every sit. If you do feel tired, go have a rest. Make sure you rest.

Question: Well, it's more important for me to get on with things because I haven't got much more time.

Linda: Well, you don't know.

But it's worth it even for a week, a day. Do you remember L.? (Yes.) Before she died she was just... She only really had a few months before she died – she was just glowing. It was amazing! Once you've realised it doesn't really matter how long you've got.

Question: I suppose I'm only adding another fear by thinking that I haven't got much time.

Linda: I said to someone the other day, "If you put this first you'll get as much time as you need," and it's true. If you really put it first, you will.

Question: Since the last retreat I've had a massive lot of grief that's been, I think, associated with realising how personal the delusions were that I'd held, how close they were to my whole sense of being. I never expected the grief and I found it completely destabilising mentally and emotionally. Is it normal in this process? It's just been an incredibly difficult three months from the last retreat.

Linda: Is it there now?

Question: Now, I'm talking about it I can feel some of it coming up. In the sit, no; a sense of joy and gratitude in just being here. But the *overwhelming* sense of that – I just wanted to ask, is it normal? I just didn't expect it and I found it so difficult.

Linda: You go through everything. You could say it's normal; whatever happens is *natural*, not normal. But often the whole thing feels overwhelming, you feel overwhelmed, so just let it overwhelm you. But try and stay reasonably stable with it. And this week will sort it out.

Question: Putting this practice first in my life – I'm not sure about that. I would say it's the most important thing in my life to become enlightened, do the practice. I come to all the retreats, but I'm still not sure if it's the most important thing. How can I tell? Because I go home, I get back into my normal life. So while I'm on retreat it's the most important thing.

Linda: But not the rest of the time?

Question: I don't know because I might do one hour of meditation in the morning and then I'm just trying to get things done during the day.

Linda: It doesn't mean you sit all day. But I know for me it was there all the time – this underlying feeling, sensation – I couldn't get away from it, it was always there. But it doesn't mean that you don't do anything else. You can be really quite busy doing stuff. The important thing is not to separate it, not to say, "This is my meditation life and this is my normal life." The two are the same – there's no two. It's only one life. But people do tend to separate it. They'll do a retreat, put everything into it, and then forget about it. Whereas if you can balance it out – and it doesn't mean you sit all day – you might just sit for half an hour, an hour, a day but in a way it's always with you in everything you do. So I'd say maybe practice when you're at home, when you're actually doing things, being a bit more aware of being in your body while you're doing things.

Question: Yes, I don't separate; my whole life is doing this. But I think that's the fear – I have to get some important things done so I'm not putting that pause in.

Linda: Well, also look at how important things are. Is this really important?

Question: I've let everything go for seven days.

Question: Is it possible for that feeling that K. was talking about to be in the background – that sort of earnestness or dedication to the practice? I've talked to you quite a bit about how I always feel like I'm not doing enough or I've failed, or just feel weak with everything. But lately I've wondered whether that's signifying that I do actually need to be doing more, or if it's just something trying to weaken the practice or how I feel about it. When I look at things I do notice there's times that I may not be acknowledging, where I could be walking and it's become to some degree habitual, to have some degree of mindfulness there. But I may not really acknowledge that I am practicing at those times and feel I'm not doing enough. Or do you think you need to have that level where it's so sustained that you do have a *lot* of dig into it?

Linda: Eventually, eventually. But it needs to build up. So eventually you've got no choice. It just takes you over whether you like it or not. And sometimes you don't want it there. It becomes so strong and you become so desperate that you'll just do anything. But it needs to build up to that. So

at the moment I feel like you're doing plenty and you shouldn't push yourself too much. Just keep doing that, be aware of that, but don't let anything undermine you like that.

So it is good to have a reasonably balanced life, but let it build up, this momentum – it's like a reverse momentum that starts. I can only speak from my experience – before I knew it, it just took over the whole thing, whatever I was doing. But it didn't mean that I didn't do things, and it was good to have to do other things. And it was actually good for me at that time not to go to an ashram or a monastery and just stay there. It was actually better for me, and I feel maybe for a lot of people, to have the stress of daily life and kids and work and stuff, and the practice. And it forced me to combine the two.

But you're doing enough. Don't overdo it because overdoing it can sort of undermine you as well too. But eventually there's no choice – it's just there all the time. It's all you think about, it's all you... It's just there.